FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL & CANCER

This information sheet provides some facts about the links between alcohol consumption and a range of cancer types. This affects not only people who drink alcohol but also their families, friends and communities.

1. Alcohol causes at least 7 types of cancer

One of the ways that alcohol (as ethanol) can cause cancer is through DNA damage.

Alcohol consumption is known to increase the risk of cancer development in:
- oral cavity (mouth)
- oropharynx (throat)
- oesophagus (gullet)
- liver
- larynx (voice box)
- colorectum (large intestine and rectum)
- female breast

2. The most common types of cancer due to alcohol are different for men and women

In 2018 in the WHO European Region the most common sites of cancers due to alcohol consumption were female breast (most common cancer site in women) and colorectum (most common cancer site in men).

In 2018 alcohol caused approximately:
- 45,500 cases from breast cancer in women
- 12,100 deaths from breast cancer in women
- 59,200 cases from colorectal cancer
- 28,200 deaths from colorectal cancer

More than 110,000 cases of cancer in men and almost 92,000 cancer deaths were caused by drinking alcohol in the WHO European Region in 2018.
3. The risk of cancer from alcohol consumption increases from the first drink

All types of alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine and spirits, can cause cancer. The risk starts at low levels and increases substantially the more alcohol is consumed.

![Infographic showing the risk of cancer from alcohol consumption](image)

4. Using tobacco as well as alcohol multiplies cancer risks

People who use both alcohol and tobacco have a 5 times increased risk of developing cancers of the oral cavity, oropharynx, larynx and oesophagus, compared with people who use either alcohol or tobacco alone.

For people with heavy drinking patterns, the risk is up to 30 times higher.

5. Cancers due to alcohol consumption are preventable

Reducing alcohol consumption will prevent cancers due to alcohol consumption.

Regulations
- to make alcohol less affordable
- to ban or restrict alcohol marketing across all types of media
- to reduce alcohol availability
- can support the reduction of alcohol consumption and ultimately of cancers due to alcohol consumption.

WHO strongly supports regulations to place health warnings on alcoholic beverages so that the public can know about the risks of cancer from alcohol consumption. They can then make informed choices, such as reducing or stopping drinking alcohol.

Together, we can achieve a SAFER WHO European Region free from harm due to alcohol

For further information and references, see "Alcohol and Cancer in the WHO European Region: an appeal for better prevention" (2020)